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Consulting Whom? Lessons from the Toronto Urban Aboriginal Strategy

Mai T. Nguyen
York University, mnguyen6@yorku.ca

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Abstract

The research conducted here looks at the current Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) in Toronto. The purpose of this Strategy is to provide long-term investments to support Aboriginal communities in urban settings by focusing on three priority areas: improving life skills; promoting job training, skills, and entrepreneurship; and supporting Aboriginal women, children, and families. This article seeks to answer the following question: Does the UAS provide Aboriginal participants with the ability to effectively participant in the consultation process? It argues that the UAS process of consulting with the urban Aboriginal community does not allow for the effective participation of Aboriginal peoples because of problematics related to consulting in an urban setting and despite the language of partnership, the federal government still reserves the right to make final decisions. These problems diminish the ability to build renewed Aboriginal-State relations based on mutual respect and trust, which has been absent within the Aboriginal-State apparatus and resulted in the political exclusion of Aboriginals in Canada. Though consultation can be a vehicle for empowering participants with decision-making authority, this is not the case in Toronto. The lack of a common vision, political buy-in, and the aura of secrecy leads to a political relationship built on mistrust. Mistrust between members and government renders the consultation process ineffective. This article combines the literature on public consultations with official government documents to identify critical components that must be evident for consultations to be fruitful and participation effective. These criteria are the benchmarks upon which to measure effectiveness. Based on interviews with the Steering Committee, this article finds that the UAS process of consulting with the Toronto Aboriginal community does not enable Aboriginal participants to effectively participate in the democratic process.

Consulting Whom? Lessons from the Toronto Urban Aboriginal Strategy

Public consultation exercises in advanced industrialized countries are becoming the norm with governments consulting and engaging with citizens in many fields of policy. This is especially the case for Aboriginal-state relations in Canada and abroad. In Canada, Aboriginal peoples have made great efforts to participate in the democratic process in order to change the course of colonialism. Aboriginal participation signifies that, similar to other citizen groups, Aboriginal peoples will no longer allow governments to make decisions on their behalf. On the other hand, Aboriginal peoples are different from other citizens in that their colonial history has, at times, resulted in socio-economic marginalization and political exclusion, which creates barriers to democratic participation. To overcome these barriers, governments in Canada have actively sought the opinion and knowledge of Aboriginal peoples in policy-making. An example of this activity is the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS). In 1997, the federal government launched the UAS designed to provide long-term investments to support Aboriginal communities in urban settings by focusing on three priority areas: improving life skills; promoting job training, skills, and entrepreneurship; and supporting Aboriginal women, children, and families. The Strategy was first implemented in 1998 in Winnipeg and half a decade later arrived on the Toronto scene. The Strategy itself employs a community engagement model for consulting and a consensus-building model for decision-making, making the model an example of an Aboriginal-state consultation exercise.

To this end, the focus of this article is the public consultation process with respect to one segment of the Canadian population, urban Aboriginal peoples. The public consultation literature argues that consultations can only be meaningful when mechanisms for effective participation are in place; if not, the process is rendered futile and frustrating for participants (Arnstein, 1969). Effective participation occurs when governments can equip Aboriginal participants with the necessary resources to make well-informed decisions about their communities. Thus, if effective, the consultation process will aid in building relationships based on trust and mutual respect amongst parties. The question this article asks is: Does the UAS process provide Aboriginal participants with the ability to effectively participate in the consultation process? That is, will participation in consultation help restore Aboriginal trust and confidence in the political system, thus removing barriers to participation? If yes, what elements and criteria must be evident for this to be the case? If no, what renders the process ineffective? If consultations are a mechanism for relationship building, what should be the government's role in facilitating this mechanism, given the barriers to democratic participation as experienced by some groups of Aboriginal peoples?

Some of the barriers are related to Aboriginal mistrust in the political process: Aboriginal peoples do not trust the State and have good reasons for their lack of trust. More critical barriers are intrinsically linked to socio-economic factors such as employment and income since the lack of both hinders the ability to meaningfully participate. In relation to the former point, Aboriginal communities experience a lack of government recognition, which can make community development difficult at times because the federal and provincial governments have been unwilling to consult with Aboriginal communities and organizations, as this research found in the Toronto case. This hinders the building of political relationships because governments have been reluctant to sit at the consultation table unless the governments themselves initiated the consultation. With regard to the latter aspect, the demographic

profile of the Toronto Aboriginal population plays a critical part in the ability of Aboriginal residents to participate in any consultation process.

According to the *2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey* (APS), Toronto's Aboriginal population stood at 26,575 and accounted for less than 1% of the total population (0.5%) (Statistics Canada, 2006) compared to other cities, such as Winnipeg, where the Aboriginal population accounts for 10% of the overall population. On the other hand, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), made up of the City of Toronto, and the Peel, York, Durham, and Halton regions, has the largest Aboriginal population of any city in Ontario, accounting for approximately 13% of the overall Aboriginal population in the province (APS, 2006). Ontario itself has the largest and most diverse Aboriginal population in Canada. In Toronto, the majority of Aboriginal peoples identify themselves as North American Indian or Métis (Statistics Canada Census, 2006). The Toronto Aboriginal population is younger than the non-Aboriginal population across all categories and has a lower proportion of seniors (McCaskill, FitzMaurice, & Cidro, 2012). The majority of Aboriginal residents tend to reside in the city of Toronto. However, a large number of these residents tend to reside in lower-income areas and in neighbourhoods with a high incidence of air pollution (McCaskill et al., 2012). Residential patterns correlate closely with income.

According to Statistics Canada (2010), in 2005, 27% of Toronto Aboriginal people were living below the low-income cut-off point (LICO) compared to only 18% of the non-Aboriginal population. Furthermore, the findings from the Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (TARP) community survey indicate that approximately 63% of respondents earned less than $40 000 per year (McCaskill, et al., 2012). The findings also point to a significant proportion (37%) of respondents who earn $40,000 or more per year thus, representing the urban Aboriginal middle-class (McCaskill, et al., 2012). However, respondents of the survey noted that, although there is a growing urban Aboriginal middle-class, they are not as politically active and engaged with the community overall (McCaskill, et al., 2012). In other words, those most likely to participate in the community and be politically active are not likely to be members of the Aboriginal middle-class. This may suggest that some of the most politically active community members may not possess the adequate resources, information, knowledge, and time to effectively participate. Therefore, in some cases, empowerment requires governments to equip Aboriginal participants with the necessary resources to become fully engaged and meaningful participants. How can governments go about achieving this end?

 This article aims to answer these questions by developing a framework for analysis, which is derived from the literature on public consultation and applies the framework to the Toronto case through interviews with Steering Committee members. Toronto has been home to the UAS for over a decade and, in March of 2012, the federal government announced it would renew the UAS for an additional two years, adding new funding of $27 million. At this point, the UAS in Toronto transitioned from a Steering Committee composed of community members to the Toronto Aboriginal Social Services Council (TASSC), which acts as an advisory body. This version of the UAS no longer employs the consultation model of decision-making based on the consensus of a nominated body of community representatives and, therefore, the research ends at this point. The Toronto Urban Aboriginal Management Committee (TUMC) managed the original incarnation of the Steering Committee, which was responsible for overseeing the implementation of the UAS.

TUMC was mandated to "identify, promote and advance opportunities to close the gap in life chances (opportunities for social advancement and economic development) for urban Aboriginal people in Toronto" (Toronto UAS Handout, 2012, p. 1). In the fiscal years of 2010 to 2011 and 2011 to 2012, the local priority, as set by TUMC, was to support programs that focused on "Serving Children and Youth, providing educational & cultural opportunities" (Toronto UAS Handout, 2012, p. 1). Priorities were determined through community feedback obtained during community engagement activities. Engagement occurred in the form of community forums. A community based on consensus building then decided on priorities.

Methods

From the public consultation literature, a series of interview questions were constructed and given to respondents during the interview process (see Appendix A). The questions sought to deconstruct participants' statements articulating their sentiments and experiences with the process. Interviewees comprised of members from TUMC. The committee is made up of 14 members: one project officer (the only salaried position); two co-chairs (one from the Aboriginal community and one representing the federal government); one national caucus representative, also from the Aboriginal community; three youth representatives from the community; three government representatives from each level of government; and four Aboriginal community members. All Aboriginal community members (except for the project officer) sit on the committee on a volunteer basis. Government representatives sit on the committee as an extension of their paid position.

In Toronto, eight interviews were conducted in total at the start of 2012 (see Table 1). Those interviewed were members of the third cycle of the Steering Committee. The original two committees were dismantled because of differing priorities. All interviews were done in-person, lasting approximately one to one and a half hours. Six other Aboriginal committee members were inaccessible via email. Community representatives who were interviewed all worked for Aboriginal organizations located throughout the city, such as Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto. All respondents worked in a professional or managerial capacity, but did not hold any executive positions within the organizations. Government representatives were more readily available to be interviewed and to answer questions, except for the federal government representative for the Office of the Federal Interlocutor (OFI) who is the Director and Co-Chair of the Toronto chapter and asked to be interviewed off the record.

Table 1. Number of Interviews by Participant Category

Community	# of Federal Government Interviews	# of Provincial and Municipal Government Interviews	# of Interviews with Aboriginal Community Members	Total # of Interviews
Toronto	2	1	5	8

Consultation Framework

Urban Aboriginal peoples pose an interesting case study because of the gap in the Aboriginal-state public consultation literature where the focus tends to be on the legal duty to consult, resource development, construction-related proposals, and self-government arrangements for nation- and land-based groups (Walker, 2005). This focus has been a by-product of the privileged state of Aboriginal rights within the eyes of the federal government. Little has been written in the way of Aboriginal-state consultations that take place in an urban setting. This may be attributed to the fact that Section 35 of the *Constitution Act* (1982), which legally recognized Aboriginal and treaty rights, conflicts with the legal duty to consult as it relates to urban Aboriginal peoples for which no specific body, organization, or leader can rightfully claim to represent any specific urban Aboriginal community. With regard to Section 35, many of the benefits that flow from the recognition of Aboriginal and treaty rights, such as the right to self-government, to land, to culture, and the right to hunt and fish, are land and group specific. This makes it increasingly difficult for urban Aboriginal populations to access their Aboriginal and treaty rights in urban centres. With respect to the legal duty to consult, whether or not cities have this duty has been a contentious issue that has been brought before the provincial courts. For example, on September 24, 2012, the British Columbia Court of Appeal decided in the case of Neskonlith Indian Band v. The City of Salmon Arm (2012) that local governments do not have a duty to consult with First Nations nor do they have the practical resources to do so. This decision can make policy coordination that much more difficult and strengthening Aboriginal-state relations that much more daunting.

Given the colonial history of Aboriginal-state relations, it is important to evaluate whether the process of public consultations will assist in repairing Aboriginal-state trust dynamics. This article attempts to evaluate the UAS consultation process through the development of a framework that is Aboriginal specific. It does so by employing Sherry Arnstein's (1969) *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* (see Figure 1) as a benchmark, as well as extracting various criteria evident in the public consultation literature. Generally, this framework is designed to determine whether the UAS allows for the effective participation of Aboriginal participants by asking questions related to the process. The framework is divided into three components, development, empowerment, and relationship building (see Table 2), which represent different crucial features of the consultation process. From here, each component devises a set of criteria that measure effectiveness in terms of redistributing power from, and building trust between, the parties.

Developmental Component

Component one, the *developmental component*, ultimately sets the agenda. At this stage in the framework, the question that needs to be asked is: Which party gets to decide the purpose and form of consultation, Aboriginal participants or the state? In other words, do Aboriginal people have a voice in determining the subject matter of the consultation and what form is to be employed? As Arnstein (1969) stated, "participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the power-holders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo" (p. 216). The typology developed by Arnstein (1969) classifies eight rungs on "a ladder of citizen participation". The first two rungs, *manipulation* and *therapy* are labeled as "nonparticipation" in which the objective of public participation is not to enable participation, but to allow power holders to "educate" or "cure" the participants (p. 217).
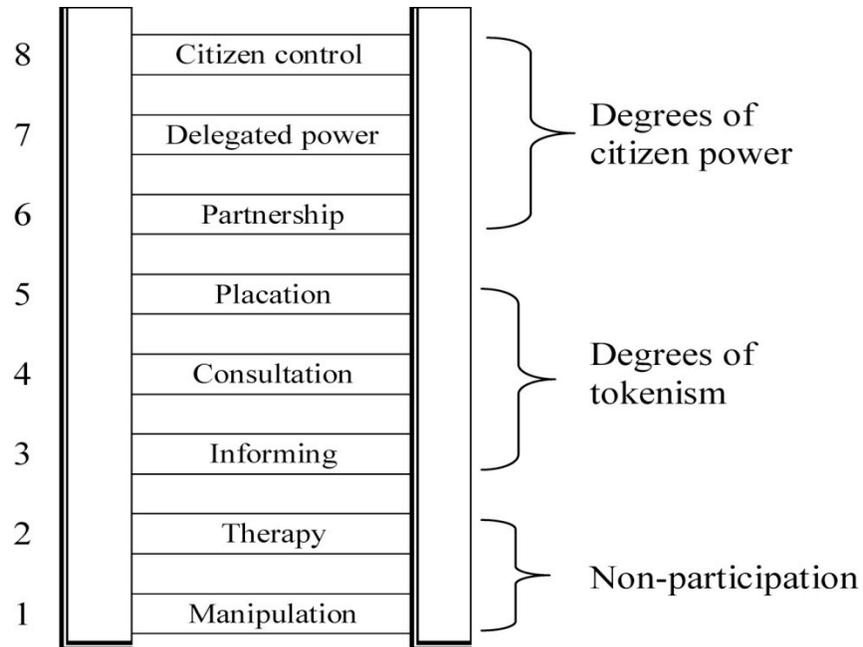
Figure 1. Arnstein's (1969) Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation.

Table 2. Evaluation Framework Sub-Components

Component	Criteria
1. Developmental	(a) Deciding subject matter
	(b) Deciding consultation mechanism
2. Empowerment	(a) Deciding representatives
	(b) Availability of resources and training provided
	(c) Communication process
3. Relationship-Building	(a) Political will
	(b) Use of input

Rungs three to five, *informing, consulting* and *placation*, progress to levels of "tokenism" in which participants hear and are heard, but lack the power to affect outcomes (p. 217). The highest three rungs, *partnership, delegated power,* and *citizen control*, progress to varying degrees of citizen power. *Partnership* allows participants to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with policy-makers, while *delegated power* and *citizen control* allow participants a large share of the decision-making authority or full managerial power (p. 217).

Similarly, King, Feltey, and Susel (1998) define authentic (effective and authentic will be used interchangeably) participation "as the ability and the opportunity to have an impact on the decision-making process" (p. 320). However, in the authors' view, many efforts at public consultation are ineffective and unauthentic because of what the authors call the "practitioner-client hierarchy" in which decision-making, agenda-setting, and gate-keeping authority remains in the hands of the administrator (King et al., 1998). Therefore, authentic participation requires participants to be part of the deliberation process from issue framing to decision-making (King et al., 1998). If this occurs it demonstrates willingness by power holders (governments) to negotiate the terms and conditions of the process and thus reallocate some degree of decision-making authority to stakeholders who now possess the ability to make decisions regarding this stage of the process.

The second question asked pertains to the form of consultation employed and, more importantly, which party decides the consultation mechanism that will be adopted. This is important given that the form chosen, specifically how decisions will be decided upon, will determine the degree of influence participants will have on the outcomes. For example, at the bottom of the ladder the rungs of Arnstein's (1969) typology (see Figure 1), *therapy* and *manipulation* are considered to invoke "nonparticipation" for which "their real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable power holders to "educate" or "cure" participants" (p. 217). On the other hand, the top rungs of *delegated power* and *citizen-control* empower participants with the majority of decision-making authority or full managerial control (Arnstein, 1969). Thus, the ability to choose which form of consultation will be adopted can allow participants a greater role in determining the final policy outcomes. In addition, allowing all parties a say in the selection process removes the ability for one party, usually the government, to retain a hegemonic position over the process.

This is crucial in the Aboriginal context as governments and Aboriginal peoples have commonly encountered roadblocks during the negotiations process (Turcotte & Zhao, 2004). As Van Den Burg (2009) stated:

> A substantial part of the problem with consultation is that the government has failed to devise an appropriate mechanism for consultations. A method of joint decision-making between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people must be conducted. Few policy-makers ... possess the field experience to understand their target population, making it difficult to design programs that properly address Aboriginal peoples' needs. (p. 20)

In other words, evading consultation a-priori policy design undermines the objectives of the consultation process because it demonstrates the government's unwillingness to share decision-making power from the start. For public consultations to be fruitful, governments must negotiate the process with Aboriginal stakeholders prior to actual consultation. Doing so demonstrates the government's

readiness to consult in good faith, a minimum requirement for regaining Aboriginal trust and redistributing power.

Empowerment Component

The *empowerment component* focuses on the twin issues of political inclusivity and mechanisms for enabling participation. At this point, evaluators need to determine: (a) who was called for participation and how were representatives of the group in question chosen; and (b) were the necessary tools for empowerment (participation) made available to participants? In regards to the first set of questions, Turnball and Aucoin (2006) stated that one of the limitations of public consultation is that it offers "a role only to those citizens who volunteer to participate. Governments do not always actively recruit a diverse set of opinions" (p. 1). Furthermore, Catt and Murphy (2003) state that the failure of governments to seek input from members of ethnic, national, and religious minorities will result in major obstacles in the domain of both legitimacy and efficacy (p. 411). In the Canadian case, this would apply to Aboriginal peoples; thus, legitimacy in policy-making requires in-depth Aboriginal representation.

In regards to the question of group representation, Catt and Murphy (2003) stated that the question to be asked here is: Who speaks for or represents the group and how are these representatives chosen? Governments have several ways to go about this task, such as random sampling. However, though this mechanism has its merits (it best approximates the principle of individual equality), it provides Aboriginal peoples with no choice in the matter. Catt and Murphy (2003) argued that allowing parties to pick their own representatives is most effective and is especially important for historically disadvantaged or marginalized groups who may not trust the government to choose representatives who will honestly and effectively represent their interests. Therefore, a better mechanism put forth by the authors is to have governments provide for a process of *group selection*, "wherein particular government-designed groups or associations would choose their own representatives to speak on their behalf" (Catt & Murphy, 2003, p. 412).

In this case, the group may choose to elect their representatives or to choose them through informal methods. Catt and Murphy (2003) argued that the importance and benefits of this mechanism of group selection is that it allows representatives to be directly accountable to the members it represents and ensures that those representatives provide an accurate account of the perspectives and priorities they represent. This is vital to the group whose interests are at stake and to the government who requires as accurate an account as possible in order to achieve efficacy and legitimacy in the policy-making process. To this end, given the cultural sensitivity of Aboriginal policies, Aboriginal communities must be assigned this responsibility.

The second set of questions in this section is concerned with determining the availability of avenues and resources needed to allow for meaningful participation to occur. Participation cannot be meaningful if the appropriate resources (e.g., internet, transportation, access to information, sufficient time), information (e.g., supporting rationales, technical or scientific information, analyses performed, costs and benefits, and potential impacts and consequences), and skills training (e.g., administrative, community engagement training) are not made available to participants. As Turnball and Aucoin (2006) stated, "The effort to make participants as informed as possible enhances the civic education aspect of the deliberation exercise. It also helps to 'level the playing field' between those participants who

initially are knowledgeable about the issue and those who are not" (p. 9). Without these resources, well-informed decisions will not occur, which will result in government officials pushing their agenda on participants (Van Den Burg, 2009). Therefore, access to information will allow for political inclusion and equality in the process. As Catt (1999) argued, "the ability to take part in the democratic process is an important step in attaining equality... Even if all have the same access to the democratic procedures there are other conditions that need to be met, such as availability of information" (p. 9).

Furthermore, King et al. (1998) argued that citizens needed to be educated, with a focus on teaching specific organizing and research skills and leadership training, for effective participation to take place. That is, though information and resources may be made available to participants, without training specific to the requirements of the process, participants may not possess the capacity to participate. For many Aboriginal participants, this is the case. Because of their damaged trust towards the state and the institutions that are part of the democratic process, Aboriginal peoples at time have found themselves politically isolated and excluded.

To this end, given the democratic roadblocks Aboriginal peoples experience, governments must provide the necessary resources (transportation costs, computer and internet access, communication devices, professional staff, access to expert consultants, etc.) and training needed for effective participation to take place. By creating an environment conducive to effective participation, citizens and administrators can work together from the beginning when issues are being defined and framed. Such an environment demonstrates willingness on the part of governments to invest in Aboriginal participation in the consultation process. This indicates, to some degree, the readiness by governments to equalize the power base and consult in good faith.

Relationship-Building Component

Component three, the *relationship-building component*, is two-fold. It examines the extent of political will for the process and how final decisions are agreed upon. More specifically, how the findings, participants' input, and comments are incorporated into the final decision. Returning to Arnstein's (1969) ladder, the first three rungs offer participants no assurance that their input will be taken into account or used. Participation at these levels is tokenistic in nature with governments having final say. Turnball and Aucoin further (2006) highlight that governments do not always commit to using public input in decision-making and, more importantly, consultation often occurs late in the process and citizens are left to respond in a context where commitments have been made and ideas hardened. As the authors stated:

> It must be clear to participants in the deliberation process that their efforts are not simply for consultative purposes or to validate decisions that have already been taken ... if citizens are to be expected to sacrifice the considerable time and energy required by meaningful public deliberations, they must be assured that the result of their deliberations "matter". A deliberative procedure that fails in this regard will be interpreted as a shallow commitment to public involvement and may even undermine, rather than enhance public trust in government. (p. 7)

In other words, in order to move away from tokenistic forms of consultation towards more meaningful and genuine consultation, Aboriginal people must have an equal opportunity to affect the final outcomes. As indicated on Arnstein's (1969) typology, the top rungs provide participants with the

opportunity to make real decisions. This is most important for Aboriginal people as they endeavour to remove the reigns of colonialism and work towards political inclusion for self-determination. Catt (1999) stated that:

> Democratic decision making as a means of obtaining self-governance to fulfill the ideal that no person should be decided for another is an important strand of argument in justifications for democracy... The other strand to the argument of self-government is that all decisions should be made only after each person has had an opportunity to express their view. Only if the decision is made by all is it legitimate. (p. 8)

To this end, decision-making power through the consultation process is a step towards political inclusion and the development of trust between governments and Aboriginal peoples. That is, by equalizing power relations, governments are entrusting Aboriginal communities with the ability to chart their own destinies. Therefore, when the criteria set here are fulfilled, governments are removing roadblocks to participation and, consequently, are building relationships with trust and respect being at the crux. In this article, the framework of analysis is applied to the Toronto UAS. The findings are summarized in the chart below.

Findings and Observations

This section analyzes the three components of the evaluation framework as it applies to the Toronto UAS case study. Table 3 summarizes the presence or absence of each of the criteria in the Toronto case. Measuring the existence of each component was derived from interviewees' responses to questions assessing criteria derived from Arnstein's (1969) standards for effective citizen participation and the public consultation literature. The findings show that the decision-making process for the Toronto UAS does not in fact meet Arnstein's standards and the criticisms within the literature hold true in the Toronto case.

Developmental Component

Deciding Consultation Mechanism. In Toronto, the sentiments towards this aspect of the developmental component are very critical of the actions of the federal government. These criticisms are rooted in the fact that the UAS arrived on the scene without any community consultation as to its purpose and subject matter. Consultation and a priori implementation had taken place in Winnipeg well before the Strategy arrived in Toronto. However, this sparked anger from the Toronto Aboriginal community who felt as though the Strategy was imposed on the community rather than being developed in partnership with the community. As one member stated:

> There was a lot of controversy with the federal government and the Aboriginal community because some community members felt the federal government just dropped the UAS on the community without consultation. Not looking at who the community is and what they would want from the strategy. (Personal Interview with UAS member, Toronto, February 23, 2012; for a complete list of interviews, see Appendix B)

Table 3. Assessment of Toronto's Urban Aboriginal Strategy on Evaluation Framework Sub-Components

Component	Criteria	Toronto
Developmental	a) Deciding consultation mechanism	No
	b) Deciding subject matter	Yes
Empowerment	a) Deciding representatives	Yes
	b) Availability of resources and training	No
	c) Communication process	Absent
Relationship Building	a) Political will	No
	b) Use of input	No

Another member noted that:

> For the UAS there is not a lot of information on what it is and people still don't know what it does and there's confusion about that so the community is not sure if we're seen as competition. One of the original purposes was to help bring all the partners to the table. You really need to have all the players to come up with a strategic plan. (Personal Interview with UAS member, Toronto, December 2, 2011)

These statements reflect the frustration felt by participants due to the lack of consultation with the community, which made some of the Aboriginal community organizations sceptical of the Strategy's intent. More specifically, the organizations feared a loss of funding since the UAS would be funded by the same, shared pot of federal money since, at the time, it was a reallocation of funding rather than new federal funding.

In the Toronto case, inter-organizational conflicts are not unfamiliar to the Aboriginal landscape. Many studies (Carter & McGregor, 2006; Jim Ward Associates, 2008; Richardson, Dimaline, Blondin, MacLeod, & Lazore, 2002) have highlighted the lack of cooperation and coordination of services between the city's Aboriginal organizations. For example, the study commissioned by the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, *In the Spirit of Unity: A Synopsis of Programs and Services Available to*

the Urban Aboriginal Population in the Greater Toronto Area, corroborate some of the earlier findings such as:

- Because of the high levels of poverty in the Toronto Aboriginal Community fundraising activities are not feasible.
- There is fragmentation in the Aboriginal community in Toronto at the agency and individual level.
- Urban Aboriginal agencies have often emerged as the representatives of the community by default sometimes resulting in fragmentation of the community. A larger more representative body is therefore needed to be more representative of the Aboriginal community. (As cited in McCaskill, et al., 2012, p. 53)

The study by Clatworthy, Hall, and Loughren (1994) supported these findings and highlighted that "Toronto's organizations reported higher levels of dependency on government resources and minimal levels of self-generated resources. Nearly 88 percent of the resources managed by these organizations were derived from government sources" (p. 62). In other words, obtaining and securing government funding is a continuous struggle for Aboriginal organizations in the city.

To this end, without consultation before implementation, in order to educate and garner community support, governments will find it increasingly difficult to gain the trust of the Aboriginal community to ensure participation. This was clearly highlighted in the interviews. As one member stated:

> If there is going to be a policy on how to make life better for urban Aboriginal people it needs to come from grassroots. It can't be government saying this is our structure, policy, and funding model and we want your input but we're still going to run the show. (Personal Interview with UAS member, Toronto, December 22, 2011)

This statement is indicative of Arnstein's (1969) category of "degrees of tokenism" in which participants are heard but lack the power to affect the outcomes. Without knowing what and how the Strategy can work in partnership with Aboriginal community organizations both governments and the community will find participation in the Strategy difficult from the initial stages of consultation.

Deciding subject matter. Though the original subject matter of the Strategy was decided half a decade ago in Manitoba, the main areas of focus (improving life skills; promoting job training, skills, and entrepreneurship; and supporting Aboriginal women, children, and families) are important and critical to the livelihoods of all urban Aboriginal communities across the country. How these policy areas are addressed and implemented become part and parcel of the consultation process. Therefore, it is important to examine which party was given the authority to decide the subject matter post-implementation. In Toronto, the Steering Committee is given the authority to decide the subject matter to be consulted or in this case, the UAS Strategic Plan. Each year TUMC will attend different events and launch its own annual events, such as a recruitment drive, to determine the needs of the community.

Community feedback is then presented at the Committee's annual "planning session," which involves a third-party facilitator to help discuss and decide the committee's priorities and final strategic plan. As the national caucus representative stated:

We sit down and discuss what the community needs are and then we send out the call for proposals based on those needs each year. There are certain criteria that have to be met. Criteria is based on what community needs are. (Personal Interview with National Caucus representative, Toronto, January 27, 2012)

The criteria must fit within the three pillars of the Strategy, which are broad enough to allow TUMC the freedom and authority to design the strategic plan.

However, despite this consultation process, several members noted that, at the end of the day, the Toronto Aboriginal community remained unaware of the Strategy's importance. This suggests that community consultation before implementation is not only important to ensure the cooperation of those involved but also to gain the community's trust in the process. Ultimately, the absence of these key factors in the developmental component renders the process ineffective. At a minimum, it raises difficulties for the government because relationships need to be forged from the ground up and cannot be piggy-backed onto existing relationships, even though TUMC had the freedom to decide the direction of the Strategic plan. This demonstrates a degree of willingness on the part of government to redistribute some aspects of the policy-design to the community, an essential component for ensuring effective participation and gaining the trust of members. On the other hand, because the Strategy was imposed on the community there is a sense of distrust surrounding the Strategy and towards those government representatives involved. Starting off on the wrong footing will require more work by governments in order to gain the trust of the community and thus to ensure effective participation can take place.

Empowerment Component

Representation. In Toronto, recruitment of members is done through a "call for nominations". The call is widely advertised throughout the Toronto Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities (bus ads, newspapers, email lists, etc.). Members are selected based on criteria developed by TUMC, which generally coincides with the committee's plans and activities. For instance, criteria may take into account geographic location within the city, skills, and experience (TUMC, 2008). In this instance, the committee is given the power to develop the selection criteria and to appoint committee representation.

In 2008, the membership recruitment drive ran from August 25th to October 17th. The broad approach used for membership development included,

a. Peer recruitment campaign, including word of mouth;

b. Advertising in the Native Canadian News;

c. New member brochure distribution;

d. Broadcast email nominations forms to Aboriginal organizations;

e. Posters advertising our new membership drive at Aboriginal organizations, community centres, pools, libraries, and health clinics in 22 of Toronto's communities with the greatest population of Aboriginal people. (Therrien, 2008)

Overall, the committee is given the opportunity to choose the method of recruitment, selection criteria, as well as appointing members. The "selections sub-committee," who assembles a shortlist of nominees and presents the final list to TUMC, who then decides the successful candidates as a whole, handles this process.

Although the selection process is handled independent of the government, low attendance by community members is a problem. At any given time, seven to eight members will be absent. Only five to six representatives attend consistently and at times the government co-chair will be absent from the meetings. The Terms of Reference (TUMC, 2008) stated that two consecutively missed meetings require the resignation of the member; however, this is currently not enforced. Low attendance creates barriers to effective participation and becomes problematic for several reasons. First, the absence of almost half of the committee results in a loss of full community representation. Second, it slows the process of consensus building. Lastly, it reduces members' morale. The combination of these setbacks makes the ability to effectively participate difficult even when the intent is there and provided by government.

For example, Steering Committee membership is based on community representation. Members are chosen based on their personal and professional experience within the community; however, low attendance means community representation and knowledge is not at the consultation table. This triggers the second concern, which is two-fold. First, when members are not in attendance, the absentees need to be briefed at the next monthly meeting. This utilizes some of the already limited time members have dedicated to the Strategy. In addition, since the process is based on consensus building, when an item has been rolled over to the next meeting, any previously absent members will need to be briefed on the discussion and consensus must be obtained again. This becomes a daunting task if and when members do not agree with the final decision, such as the design of the UAS logo. As one government representative stated:

> There are frustrations in those things we discuss and need to make decisions on. I don't know how to stop that. The collective people need to decide to stop discussing. An example of that is our logo that we had. We had a member on our committee who does graphic design. We offered to use her company to make the logo for us. Those of us at the meeting picked which one we wanted to use. Next meeting there was a debate about which logo to use based on the people at this new meeting because they were not at the previous meeting when we decided. (Personal Interview with government representative, February 23, 2012)

This is a simplistic example of the difficulties that arise from low attendance. Nonetheless, it does highlight the ways in which the committee is faced with roadblocks attempting to put the Strategy into action. This can make consensus building an onerous, tedious, and slow process, especially since the committee only meets once a month.

However, low participation is symptomatic of a deeper democratic concern, which is, according to many members, the absence of OFI at the table. Members stated that the absence of government at the meetings makes the members feel as though their participation is futile, especially since the federal government initiated the consultation but is not there to listen. This lowers morale and results in low attendance. As one member stated:

> It's disheartening cause we need representation … some say it's frustrating because of the way government act but they are not giving up on the government but are giving up on us by not showing up. (Personal Interview with UAS member, Toronto, March 1, 2012)

That is, the physical absence of government at the table is more detrimental to the Strategy than the absence of members from time to time. This creates a barrier to effective participation in which members lose faith in the process and distrust those who called them to the table. As one member stated:

> I think it would be helpful if the federal government would come to meetings. When he or she doesn't come to the meetings or explain his/her decision it adds to the distrust. (Personal Interview with committee member, Toronto, April 4, 2012)

In this instance, the issue of member selection and community representation is not up for debate. Both in theory and in practice, the government has delegated this power to the committee. Although the government has a seat on the selections sub-committee, they do not make final appointments. The process used to select committee members demonstrates the willingness of the government to entrust the community with the opportunity to choose its representatives. However, the main concern for the Toronto UAS is the lack of attendance by committee members, which affects the ability of all members to effectively participate and represent the community as it prolongs implementation. More importantly, the lack of representation at the table from both members and the federal government lowers morale amongst the committee resulting in a vicious cycle of absence breeding absence. Thus, the ability to develop trust between governments and Aboriginal participants must begin with the presence of government at the table. That is, although the intent to empower the community is there, it cannot be fully realized when the figures that represent the power dynamic is not present.

Resources and training. Resources and training include those tools needed to ensure participants can adequately participate. This includes time (deadlines, personal time), resources (funding), access to information (for incoming members, for referencing projects), and training. The availability of time includes dedicated time from individual members and time allocated to run the programme and implement the Strategy. A major problem with the UAS is that such a large programme is run on volunteer power. The only paid positions were those within the government and the project officer; as Aboriginal community representatives noted, they were not paid by their employers to attend meetings. Most members noted that it is unrealistic to run such a programme on volunteerism. As one member commented:

> To run an engine like this on volunteer power, of course you're not going to get anywhere. But all government officials are paid to work on this. If they want to make it effective they need to have full-time staffing to work on this. Even getting the website running is a huge job. (Personal Interview with committee member, December 22, 2012, Toronto).

In addition, the limited time frame for which the Strategy is renewed increases pressure on the Steering Committee and the Aboriginal community organizations receiving funding to ensure all funding is allocated and all activities are concluded prior to the end of the government fiscal year (March 31st). This poses a barrier to effective participation because it can result in the funding of projects without appropriate knowledge or implementing projects that may not be an appropriate fit for the UAS and that

do not fulfill funding requirements. Furthermore, such limited terms make it difficult to benchmark actual outcomes and successes, especially if the organizations are not given sufficient time to properly launch projects. For example, the final report for the Parkdale Recreation Centre (2009), *Engaging the Aboriginal Community in Recreation Centre 2007/08*, stated that the project was affected by a late February 2008 approval to achieve project completion by the end of March 2008. This limited project performance in three main areas: restricted depth of community promotion, reduced outreach to stakeholders, and reduced level of stakeholder involvement in project development phase. This is a significant roadblock to the Strategy's success given that the project was able to develop partnerships with the Miziwe Biik Development Corporation and the Toronto Public Health's Peer Nutrition Program as a direct result of this project. More time may have allowed the project greater visibility in the community, which may have produced additional collaborations.

Furthermore, the uncertainty of continued funding makes it difficult to design and implement a strategic plan, which will focus on long-term goals since the committee is in constant fear the federal government will terminate the programme when the funding period is concluded. As one member noted:

> Come end of the fiscal year March 31ˢᵗ you don't know if that program will still be available, it leaves people on edge. (Personal interview with committee member, Toronto, December 22, 2012)

This poses barriers to participation in two ways. First, as mentioned above, early TUMC must ensure all funding is allocated prior to the end of the fiscal year. Second, during the early months in the calendar year, members do not have much to do or discuss at the meetings as they await renewal decisions. This is not a good use of volunteers' time and so will affect effectiveness even though other resources maybe readily available.

For example, resources such as transportation, accommodations, internet access, and documentation were made available to participants; however, one item of contention was the unavailability of internal government information pertaining to the Strategy. Members noted that information such as minutes from meetings, previous TOR, final reports, communications and correspondence were not available to members upon request. Only government officials and the project officer had access to the minutes. In addition, the national and regional websites for the UAS were limited and out dated, making the ability to access information on the project and progress difficult in two respects. Those members new to the UAS had difficulty obtaining information about the strategy and its past accomplishments without access to minutes and/or information from the official website.

Furthermore, what seems to be a common concern throughout the interviews is the lack of any relevant documents pertaining to the Strategy in Toronto. One member noted that record keeping was a serious issue for the chapter especially since the group has high turnover. As the member stated,

> Archiving is really important for new members so we can see progress, best practices, projects, etc. But there is no archiving because there is not enough staff, manpower, or resources. Like we are trying to keep ourselves afloat and not sink. (Personal Interview with committee member, December 22, 2012, Toronto)

To summarize, the lack of internal information is an obstacle to effective participation because it prevents incoming members from becoming knowledgeable on the administrative and policy side of the Strategy.

This may be especially crucial for members that will take on the position of co-chair or national caucus representative. Inadequate information or lack of training for these positions impedes the decision-making process because of inefficiencies in the learning process. As one government official stated:

> We do not provide any training for those who chair our meetings. There is a proper way to run a meeting but there is no reason that we sit there and sit there and nothing gets completed. If you chair the meetings you need to be able to wrap it up at the end of the meeting and make sure things get accomplished. (Personal Interview with government representative, February 23, 2012, Toronto)

Without adequate access to information and appropriate training of members, which may include mechanisms for communicating and engaging with the community, the process makes it difficult for members to effectively participate as they lack the expertise to be successfully part of the process. Without such resources, members cannot make informed decisions, hence limiting participation. Ultimately, this places the UAS process in the middle rungs of Arnstein's (1969) ladder in which participation is a form of tokenism rather than empowerment.

Furthermore, in Toronto, community cohesion becomes that much more difficult because of the organizational differences and "turf wars" already evident in the city. As one member stated:

> The UAS is not an effective way to work with Aboriginal governments in Toronto because of all the saturation we have from all the different non-profit organizations and agencies. For the UAS there is not a lot of information about what it is and people still don't know what it does. There is confusion about that so they're not sure if we're seen as competition. (Personal Interview with community member, December 22, 2011, Toronto)

The view that the UAS may be competition for other Aboriginal community organizations makes the small pot of federal funding appear that much smaller.

For example, in 2007, the chapter received $700,000, but funding was later reduced to $400,000 for the fiscal year on the behest of OFI in Ottawa. A budget of $400,000 per year for the Strategy is an ambitious endeavour, which becomes increasingly unrealistic when UAS projects cannot be appropriately streamlined with existing services, resulting in the duplication of services. One of the major criticisms expressed by committee members is the fact that government withdraws funding when something is not done in accordance with government expectations. As one member stated, regarding a UAS campaign ad:

> Honesty and communication prevent participation and so you almost get disciplined if you do something bad. For example, the UAS forgot to put the Aboriginal Affairs Ontario logo on the campaign ad and because we forgot to put the provincial government's logo on the campaign we lost $100,000. We just got a letter saying there is no money left and the funding will be cut. (Personal Interview with community member, March 1, 2012)

The issues surrounding funding are numerous and problematic in that the lack of funding and the lack of a common understanding as to what the UAS represents places a burden on the shoulders of the Aboriginal committee members. That is, their participation and ability to implement the Strategy is hindered because they need to find ways to successfully bridge the broken relationship between governments and the Aboriginal community, rather than addressing community policy concerns. A large part of this burden is symptomatic of the poor communication process.

Communication process. The Toronto UAS suffers from a lack of open communication and thus a lack of trust between members and government. This is not exclusive to the UAS; rather, it is the norm with Aboriginal-state relations and the Toronto UAS and is not an exception to the rule. All community members stated that the government has never been transparent and accountable to the committee. Members have mentioned on several occasions that the government has not been forthcoming when it comes to funding. As one member stated:

> The renewal process is very frustrating because you are dealing with the federal government who is very quiet and doesn't want to say anything. There is no transparency. (Personal Interview with community member, January 27, 2012, Toronto)

Some members noted that "back door deals" have been made without members' knowledge. For example, there have been occasions when the three levels of government met with each other to discuss funding without community representation at the table. As the community co-chair noted:

> I should have been at the table when the director met with the city but the director told me to take care of my end and the director would take care of his or her end. We still don't know what happened at that meeting but we know we lost some funding. (Personal Interview with community member, March 1, 2012)

These communication concerns appear to be the major obstacle to building trust with the community. Again, this is not a new phenomenon in Aboriginal-state relations but it signifies that a change needs to be made when governments are asking Aboriginal leaders to sit at the consultation table. One of the ways this can be best achieved is by thoroughly laying out expectations and delineating roles of all members including government and committee members. The lessons that appear to come from the literature (Hess & Adams, 2007) and from past experiences is that government and Aboriginal groups cannot properly navigate tensions that arise from a lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities. That is, all participants must understand where the power shifting will take place but more importantly, if power shifting will take place at all. As one member stated:

> The members did not feel they had the agency to push forth ideas. To ask us to be innovative but not let us run with it is a consistent barrier" (Personal Interview with community member, December 22, 2011, Toronto)

In other words, without a clear understanding of where and when the power will shift, trust, and mutual respect will not develop, which is largely a by-product of the communication process.

For example, one government official noted that in the beginning of the Strategy, members were looking at the UAS to become another Aboriginal agency to allocate money for projects as opposed to the

federal government who looked at it as providing funding and helping with the capacity building of a number of agencies (Personal Interview with government official, February 23, 2012). According to this official, the tension arose because all members were unclear about each other's roles and, therefore, mistrust developed from both the community and government side. As the member stated:

> I think the change (more stable committee) came because people were a bit more understanding of what was expected of them and more of a willingness from government part to actually listen and talk with members on the committee. There have been some members on the government side who didn't know what their role was and had the mentality of "I'm in charge and that's it. (Personal Interview with government official, February 23, 2012)

This statement reflects the ongoing paternalistic attitude of government in their dealings with the Aboriginal community. A process based on consensus building cannot effectively occur if governments are not open, transparent, and accountable to the community with which they claim to be partnering.

This suggests that for public consultations to be fruitful a change in attitudes must occur. Governments cannot ask Aboriginal community members to voluntarily devote resources, both personally and professionally, to a government strategy without levelling the playing field. Public consultations and community engagement projects cannot be hierarchical in nature. To ask the public to go above and beyond their civic duty without setting realistic expectations of partnerships and consultation, and without being accountable and transparent, makes the process a futile exercise. This became the case in the summer of 2010, when due to internal conflicts OFI halted the Strategy. Posted on the Turtle Island Native Network's Forum by a former UAS Co-Chair was the following:

> It is with much regret that I must advise you of the impending closure of the Toronto Urban Aboriginal Strategy office located at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto; including the termination of the staff and services at that location. The Office of the Federal Interlocutor (Ontario Region), within Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, arbitrarily made this decision without proper consultation. They shut their ears to our counsel. This decision by governmental officials is not one that any member of our Community had any voice to. TUMC is composed of community members as well as governmental representatives. The Toronto Aboriginal Community Reps, or TAC, which is composed of members with vested interest in the community, have passionately rejected the closure of the UAS office, for it serves as a hub – a place to meet, discuss and most importantly, a beacon to be drawn to. The members of the Toronto Urban Management Committee (TUMC) are on summer hiatus and did not participate nor consent with this action. In effect, this has silenced the voice of the community and ended your participation in this project. The largest challenge in inter-government relations with Aboriginal peoples has been communication - whether it is Nation to Nation or individual to representative. The failure to communicate and consult and to respond and respect is yet another failed attempt to sustain cohesion in a complicated relationship. (Bolton, 2010)

This is one of several occasions where the UAS has threatened to close its doors due to intra-committee conflict. Much of the conflict arises from the lack of communication: specifically, the lack of transparency and accountability from government to members. The weakness of the communication process results in an inefficiency in relationship building based on mutual respect and trust. For

participation to be effective and consultations to be fruitful, trust as a by-product of open communication must become a priority for success. Without trust, Aboriginal participants will continue to experience political barriers to participation even when mechanisms for encouraging participation and resources are provided.

Relationship Building Component

Relationship building is one of the crucial elements to building trust that is at the heart of Aboriginal-state relations. The UAS attempts to bridge this gap by engaging with the urban Aboriginal community in order to deliver services that benefit the community. However, this cannot be achieved without the political support of those that make the urban Aboriginal community unique. This includes Aboriginal community organizations, employers, and government at all three levels. In an urban setting, there is no one body or institution that speaks for the Aboriginal community as there is on reserves and so the governance of the urban Aboriginal community involves many stakeholders. It is the cooperation of these stakeholders that ensure the success and failures, if any, of urban Aboriginal life. Similarly, the ability of community members to effectively participate on the UAS relies on this cooperation as well. The absence of such cooperation hinders the capacity of the committee to engage with the community and successfully deliver the UAS. In Toronto, the committee lacks the political support to achieve this goal.

Aboriginal community organizations. Support from the Aboriginal community and community organizations is central to the success of the UAS. The UAS is designed to improve the urban lives of Aboriginal peoples by making individuals self-sufficient through the coordination of intergovernmental and community efforts. This is to be achieved at the organizational level where gaps in service delivery and programs can be filled. Additionally, Aboriginal community organizations in urban settings are one of the best sources of knowledge concerning the needs of the community. Therefore, without the political support of Aboriginal organizations the Steering Committee will experience difficulties participating on the UAS (i.e., unable to identify community needs and closing service-delivery gaps) and this will affect the success of the Strategy. All members interviewed commented on the lack of support they felt they received from the Aboriginal community organizations. As one government official noted:

> The Aboriginal community is not keen on the term consultation. Now the problem when governments come here (Toronto) to talk is we do not have any designed leaders like in First Nations community where you know who the elected and traditional leaders are. Everyone comes from different backgrounds. There is not one body that speaks to the community. The original group of UAS people attempted to become that body but the community was like "no, you don't speak for me and I don't speak for you." So the consultation process can be a bit onerous in Toronto because there is not one voice that speaks for the community. (Personal Interview with government official, February 23, 2012, Toronto)

This statement sheds light on the diversity of the Aboriginal community in Toronto. The reality that Toronto Aboriginal community organizations are largely dependent on government funding (Clatworthy et al., 1994) and given the reaction to the arrival of the UAS suggests that organizations felt

its government funding was threatened and, therefore, the community could not collaborate on efforts in support of the UAS. As one member pointed out:

> Some of the agencies felt their agency was being threatened by the new funding of the UAS. So that's why there was a bit of a problem first establishing this. (Personal Interview with government official, Toronto, February 23, 2012)

Although the original intent of the UAS was to work in partnership with the Aboriginal community, without clearly consulting and informing the community at large a-priori the UAS, the Strategy did not receive the community support it needed to ensure the success of the Strategy.

Employers. Another element of external support that is generally ignored in the literature is that of the employers. The role of employers plays a significant part in providing political support to the UAS because the majority of TUMC positions are volunteer-based. They are not paid positions and volunteers agree to devote at least one day a month to attend meetings in addition to any other community activity required (community forums, planning sessions, sub-committees, etc.). Given this, support for the Strategy must also stem from the members' employers. In the Toronto case, such support is scarce. Unlike other chapters (that meet for a full work day), members here meet after work for four hours in the evening to discuss the Strategy. Only the government representatives reported being given adequate time to participate because some it was part of their job description. For one government member, it was not part of the job description, but the interviewee's employer provided the respondent with lieu days in exchange for the member's participation on the committee.

The reality is, when community members do not receive flexibility from their respective employers, the ability for members to effectively participate is hampered. This is not a component generally recognized by the public consultation or urban Aboriginal literature. Much of the literatures' focus is on processes and organizational capacity. It neglects to recognize the part of employers in understanding and advocating Aboriginal issues and particularly, in this case, supporting the UAS mandate. Though many of the members are employed by specific Aboriginal organizations, due to conflicts of interests (government funding, mandate issues, etc.), there may be a lack of support from employers to members. As one member pointed out:

> Toronto right from the start has been shaky because Toronto already has all these organizations working for these (UAS) causes. (Personal Interview with government official, Toronto, February 23, 2012)

To some degree, support for employers is just as important as support from the very organizations the UAS is attempting to work with.

Government. The role of government is the most vital piece of the puzzle. It is largely the attitudes of government representatives that will determine the success of the relationship. Since the federal government is calling upon Aboriginal representatives to participate at the table, governments must consult in good faith. That is, if the government is agreeing to a consensus-building model of decision-making then government representatives must be willing to give up some of their power to the stakeholders. For Toronto, the major conflicts have been between governments and committee members and the power struggles that occur intra-committee.

The lack of trust in Toronto stems from a long history of colonialism and is further impaired by the fact that community members did not feel there was political support from government officials in the ways of attendance, transparency, and accountability. For example, on several occasions the community has asked the mayor to attend the meetings but he declined. This is demoralizing especially when Toronto was aware that other chapters (Ottawa, Thunder Bay, Winnipeg) receive strong support from its municipal governments, which are very proactive with the UAS. One member noted that:

> We don't have the mayor saying this is a good thing, we are going to work with you. One time I had Ford articulate to me, "why am I going to put special emphasis on Aboriginal issues?" (Personal Interview with UAS member, Toronto, December 22, 2011)

Another member mentioned that:

> Thunder Bay has a lot of members of government sitting with them, mayors and councillors. We've invited ours but they don't come. (Personal Interview with UAS member, Toronto, October 13, 2011)

A lack of political support regardless of the level of government signifies to Aboriginal members that their participation is not valued and the Strategy is irrelevant to the political agenda even though government initiated the consultation.

Another source of contention pertains to the lack of transparency by government. During the interview process, numerous respondents expressed their frustration with the way government, particularly the government co-chair, interacted with the committee. The general consensus was that government continues to act in a position of authority rather than as an equal stakeholder in the partnership. Despite the rhetoric of partnership, the members felt governments continued to have final say. According to some of the members, on several occasions one or more levels of government have removed funding from the Strategy without consulting with the committee or providing justification for the decision. For example, in 2011 the government decided to reallocate $60,000 from the Toronto chapter to another chapter without explanation (Personal Interviews with UAS members, Toronto, October 13, 2011 and January 27, 2012). On another occasion, the City of Toronto withdrew $20,000 of funding without providing a rationale. As one member observed:

> We wrote a letter (to the City of Toronto) but are still waiting on a response as to why they withdrew funding. At this municipal meeting no Steering Committee was present, only the governments were present. (Personal Interview with UAS member, Toronto, October 13, 2011)

It is this veil of secrecy that makes members feel there is no political support for their efforts and dedication to the Strategy. The lack of transparency from government to committee also spills into the community. For instance, when the government cannot communicate their funding decisions to the committee, the committee cannot account for the loss of funding to the community. As one member stated in regards to the loss of $60,000:

> The money was given away without our knowledge. We need to be accountable to our community but we are not given a reason why funding was withdrawn from us. (Personal Interview with UAS member, Toronto, October 13, 2011)

This creates a vicious cycle in which the absence of political support from the government breeds mistrust from the committee and, thus, mistrust from the community they represent. Therefore, effective participation requires relationship building, which must begin from the top down, and this includes equalizing power dynamics through greater transparency. However, this is not occurring in the Toronto case.

On numerous occasions during the interview process members had alluded to the fact that, ultimately when push comes to shove, the federal government still has final say as representatives at the table. As one member stated:

> This Steering Committee is an advisory committee. It is up to the federal government. They can say yay or nay to something, they have final say. It is problematic because you don't want members to feel tokenized. In other places it works better. For example, in Ottawa there are no government chairs. All are Aboriginal members so in that Steering Committee there is no government say. In Ottawa their voices are louder. (Personal Interview with Project Officer, Toronto, November 17, 2011)

This sentiment was also in a remarked by another Toronto member who argued that having government as a co-chair made him or her less objective. The national caucus representative stated that allowing the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Director to vote as co-chair was not in the best interest of the Steering Committee. Since the director is the federal government representative, allowing the director a seat at the table makes the director less objective when the committee essentially reports to the director (Personal Interview with National Caucus representative, Toronto, January 27, 2012). As the member stated:

> It's a conflict of interest because we report to him and essentially he reports to himself. (Personal Interview with National Caucus representative, Toronto, January 27, 2012)

These comments underline a deeper sentiment in which members do not feel the process is a partnership with the government. Rather, members feel that government is an obstacle to the success of the Strategy and a roadblock to the members' ability to effectively participate. In other words, having government sit as co-chair undermines the redistribution of power that the Strategy is designed to represent.

Decision-making. Decision-making within TUMC operates under the principle of consensus building. According to the 2008 TOR, consensus means:

> The Committee will make decisions wherever possible by consensus. Decisions will go to a vote only when consensus cannot be reached. Consensus for the purposes of the committee does not mean total agreement but that everyone can accept the final decision. (TOR, 2008, p. 8)

The definition of consensus set out by TUMC (2008) is as follows:

> Consensus is a mutual agreement among committee members that legitimate concerns of members have been addressed by the committee such that all members can support the decision. It is important to remember that a consensus decision does not mean that everyone agrees. It does mean that all members have had an opportunity to express their opinion and feel that they have been heard by the group. (Annex D)

This creates problems in and of itself. First, the need to gain consensus can hinder and slow down the process of both decision-making and implementation of the strategic plan especially when attendance is low.

More importantly though, the most crucial obstacle to the decision-making process is the fact that most members felt government officials still controlled the process. That is, at the end of the day the government can decide whether or not the strategic plan and/or projects will be funded. One of the major issues that caused tension within the UAS was the fact that $350,000 was withdrawn from the chapter because some projects did not meet the criteria set out in the mandate (Personal Interview with UAS member, Toronto, January 27, 2012). This lends itself to the reality that some members felt the director could not be objective and ultimately, at the end of the day the government still makes the final decision. In theory, consensus building is the best way to achieve equality and empower members; in practice, it is the process of getting to a consensus that appears to be most frustrating for members because of the lack of support, transparency, and accountability the government displays for the Strategy.

Conclusion

This case study is about hope and the future of Aboriginal-state relations: Hope that Aboriginal political participation will not go to the wayside and that governments can and should enable participation that counts. It is also about the future of Aboriginal-state relations. When participation is effective, trust and respect in government and the political process will ensue. This is part of rebuilding strong Aboriginal-state relations, which can, and must, be remedied. The goal for this research is to highlight the difficulties of Aboriginal-state consultations in an urban setting. More importantly, it hopes to begin a dialogue with Aboriginal communities, governments, and urban communities dealing with the policy problems Aboriginal peoples encounter in urban settings. In general, public consultations are about giving citizens a "voice"; however, the historical-political relationship between the state and Aboriginal peoples need to be renewed. Renewal needs to be vested in giving Aboriginals "choice" when it comes to matters affecting the group. That is, consultation needs to move away from being general in nature and move up the ladder towards more effective mechanisms for participation and ultimately partnerships. This must also involve a-priori policy-making. Governments can no longer claim to consult without providing Aboriginal participants mechanisms for enabling meaningful participation.

The UAS is an attempt by the federal government to do just that and, more specifically, to ensure the success of Aboriginal peoples in urban life. It does so by emphasizing the importance of forging political relationships between governments and the urban Aboriginal community through community consultation. The question this paper asked is: Does the UAS process provide Aboriginal participants with the ability to effectively participant in the consultation process? Based on the framework used for

evaluation, the answer to this question is conditional in that only when the criteria are met will public consultations ensure effective participation and forge relationships based on mutual respect and trust. When this occurs, the effects of political marginalization as experienced by Aboriginal peoples will be lessened. However, in practice this is not always the case, as illustrated by the Toronto UAS.

The research conducted here demonstrates that even when the intent and design of the process is geared towards ensuring the effective participation of members, many obstacles internal and external to the process will render the process ineffective. Internally, the lack of government presence, government resources, government transparency, and political support is detrimental to the success of the Strategy since it denotes the unwillingness of governments to enable effective participation and to engage in a real partnership with the community, although by design the UAS is meant to achieve just that. Specifically, the government representatives came to the table not as partners in the enterprise but as supervisors of the Strategy and, therefore, undermined the ability of the Aboriginal members to effectively participate. This suggests that for Aboriginal-state public consultations to be successful governments must take the lead and enter the community as community members to create relationships that demonstrate faith and trust in the Aboriginal community.

Furthermore, according to the members, the lack of time and funding to fully deliver the Strategy placed a strain on the Steering Committee's ability to participate. Infinite resources are not something governments or the community can readily provide, which can make implementation a daunting task. However, resources such as access to information, technical support, and leadership training are tangible resources governments can provide. Providing resources to ensure that effective participation is possible is the role and responsibility of government in relation to the consultation process. The purpose of this study is not to pinpoint the exact and necessary resources each urban Aboriginal community requires in order to participate; rather it is to highlight the difficulties involved in Aboriginal-state public consultations in an urban setting when the appropriate resources for effective participation are not available.

Externally, the lack of community support and cohesion was particularly difficult for the Committee. Specifically, the issue of community representation in urban settings will continue to be a roadblock experienced by urban Aboriginal communities as it pertains to Aboriginal-state consultations. Without an appointed or elected political body that can represent the diverse interests of the Toronto urban Aboriginal community, ensuring that effective participation will occur will not be an easy task for both government and Aboriginal community representatives. However, resolving this issue will not occur overnight. On the other hand, the case study of the UAS does illustrate the difficulties that can occur with policy implementation when community representation is not adequate. Specifically, without agreed upon representation, there was a lack of community support and a common vision for the Aboriginal community. This created roadblocks at the consultation table because consensus amongst the members was hard to achieve. Although the intent to ensure effective participation was evident in the policy design, many factors were outside the control of the UAS committee and, thus, speak to larger political issues and problems of Aboriginal-state consultations in urban settings.

For far too long, Aboriginal communities in Canada have let governments make important decisions on their behalf without, and at times with, their consent. Public consultations have become one of the avenues upon which the latter has been achieved. But participating in public consultations does not

guarantee Aboriginal participation will be effective and meaningful. A promise by government to consult is no longer sufficient to build a relationship based on mutual respect and trust. Governments in Canada must go beyond their duty to consult toward understanding the Aboriginal political landscape involved in consultation. As "citizens plus," it is the responsibility of government to equip Aboriginal communities with at least the minimum resources and tools to effectively participate. Climbing the ladder of citizen participation requires a foundation that cannot be built without Canadian governments as partners in the enterprise.

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Appendix A

Questions To Participants

Questions related to participation:

1. How were you chosen or approached to be part of the Steering Committee (SC)?
2. What is your involvement in the SC?
3. Do you know how members were contacted and chosen to join the SC?
4. To your knowledge were members of the Steering Committee given the opportunity to decide the purpose or form of the consultation? Or, was this decided a-priori your involvement?
5. What about consultation mechanisms, who gets to decide this?
6. Were the tools/resources (internet, transportation cost, access to info, sufficient time, funding, etc.) needed for participation made available to you?
7. What obstacles (trust issues, bureaucratic control, etc.), if any, do you think hindered your ability to fully participate?
8. Finally, in your opinion what is needed to make the participation of members more effective?

Questions related to the process:

1. How was agenda/policy direction decided? In other words, what policy projects get pushed through and how/why?
2. How does the SC reach final decisions?
3. Is the process democratic?
4. How is your input used in the final decisions
5. How does the SC overcome conflict?
6. Is there any suggests on how to make the process work better for Aboriginal people?

Questions related to the strategy:

1. How is the UAS addressing urban aboriginal poverty?
2. Is it working?
3. Is the UAS trying to be the face of the urban Aboriginal population in Winnipeg?
4. How does it attempt to forge relationships with the community and how does it build capacity?
5. Why do urban Aboriginal organizations seem to cooperate so well with each other?
6. Is the UAS an effective way for governments to work collaboratively with the Aboriginal community?
7. Would you be able to comment on why Winnipeg is one of the more successful UAS communities?
8. What elements were present that allowed Winnipeg to be a success?
9. Finally, what could make this strategy more effective for Aboriginal people in terms of the achieving the main goals of the UAS?

Appendix B

List of Interviews

Community member. (November 07, 2011). Personal interview conducted in Toronto.

Community member. (December 22, 2011). Personal interview conducted in Toronto.

Community member. (January 27, 2012). Personal interview conducted in Toronto.

Community member. (March 01, 2012). Personal interview conducted in Toronto.

Community member. (April 04, 2012). Personal interview conducted in Toronto.

Government representative. (February 02, 2012). Personal interview conducted in Toronto.

Government representative. (February 10, 2012). Personal interview conducted in Toronto.

Government representative. (February 23, 2012). Personal interview conducted in Toronto.